

California Polytechnic State University

'Granny D' a Hit with Cal Poly Students, Faculty and Staff

SAN LUIS OBISPO -- Wearing her trademark straw hat with turkey feathers and sounding a lot like Katharine Hepburn, ambling activist Granny D spins a yarn about two folks who live on different sides of a mountain.

Doris 'Granny D' Haddock takes the podium in Vista Grande before her breakfast talk.

The eastern-slope resident has observed that when it rains the water runs off to the east.

On the other side of the mountain, the western resident has observed that rainwater heads to the west.

Because neither has journeyed to the other's side of the mountain, they have some rather contentious conversations when they talk on the phone about which way water runs. Each is convinced that he has the facts to support his opinion

“When we take up permanent position on either side of the mountain, we base our opinions on half the information,” explains the 94-year-old New Hampshire resident, who is best known for walking across the country at age 89 to bring attention to the need for reform of political campaign funding.

Author and current candidate for U.S. Senate in New Hampshire Doris Haddock, a.k.a. Granny D, spoke at various locations on campus Oct. 14, starting with a 7:30 a.m. breakfast at Vista Grande.

"Granny D" Co-author Dennis Burke and Haddock address the Vista Grande crowd.

Haddock and co-author Dennis Burke spoke to the public and signed copies of her book at the Performing Arts Center the evening of Oct. 15.

Granny D sees the solution to the divisiveness that confronts our nation today as learning to be “a man or a woman of the world, instead of an ant on a mountainside.”

“There are always plenty of facts to support any position, so let's go instead with love, humanity and civil behavior,” she says.

The beginning of wisdom, she suggests, comes when we place ourselves in the position of the other person and “try to express their position even better than they do.”

She advocates “the politics of what works.” Instead of haranguing each other with ideology and posturing with religious certitude, she suggests looking for a common intention, because “our differences are nothing compared to our common civic values.”

Haddock signs autographs in Vista Grande following her breakfast talk.

Next, she recommends focusing on an outcome, not on ideology. “Don’t tell me what you believe, but what you want to happen. Look at practical approaches. Look at what others are doing and agree to try some of these things,” she says.

Addressing the faculty members who came to hear her speak, Granny D. told them it is their duty “to encourage young people to consciously examine their mental frameworks and open their minds.”

Teachers can capitalize on the natural curiosity of children and young adults, such as “the little Eskimo boy” she met once in her travels, “who asked me to tell him what a tree feels like.”

An excellent approach for inspiring students to learn about more about the world is to make sure there are newspapers in schools. “Younger pupils can start with headlines, progressing to stories, and later to editorials and letters to the editor. Encourage your children and your students to spend just 15 minutes a day to see what’s going on in the world,” she said.

How does she stay inspired, despite setbacks and challenges? By take one step at a time, whether it’s crossing the desert or running for the senate, and by thinking of others. “I think about my 16 grandchildren. I want to leave them a decent legacy.”

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